

VZCZCXRO7684
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHVN #0757/01 2230748
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 110748Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0222
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2019
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0293
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0911
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0087
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1084
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0152
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0462
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 7723
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENTIANE 000757

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR G, EAP/MLA
DEPT PASS TO USTER FOR D. BISBEE AND TO USAID FOR D. CARROLL
BANGKOK FOR USAID, MACARTHUR, FOR RMO, REO, CDC, AND FAS
ROME FOR FAO
HHS FOR ELVANDER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [KFLU](#) [LA](#)

SUBJECT: LAOS WEEKLY AVIAN INFLUENZA REPORT

VIENTIANE 00000757 001.2 OF 002

11. Summary: The GoL says it has succeeded in controlling AI - the kind of statement that suggests that they do not fully appreciate the seriousness of the situation. Public reporting on AI has improved somewhat, due to GoL nervousness about recent outbreaks, but the fact is the response was too little too late. The Thai and Lao authorities are making some efforts to cooperate, but much more public education is needed. Also, an important point regarding compensation for farmers should enter the AI canon - only culled birds should be counted. End summary.

Much ado about little

12. The GoL is now claiming to have bird flu under control, and that the culling operations during July were completely successful. The sanitary cordon around the affected villages remains in place and the humans there are being monitored for flu-like symptoms. Post is not so optimistic. No more outbreaks have been reported, but surveillance remains patchy at best, and the small outbreak that began in June, and was only "discovered" in July, stretched the GoL's response capabilities to the limit. While visiting AI experts compliment the Lao on their quick response in order to encourage them, in fact the response was tardy and inadequate. Furthermore, we have seen that the GoL remains perfectly capable of concealing negative information. Despite many warnings, even in Vientiane Capitol chickens and ducks are routinely mixed together in live markets. This need not surprise anyone, for most of the public information about AI has been in the English Language press, read mostly by expats. Lao language reporting on it has been much more limited, though that situation has improved somewhat over the past two weeks.

The GoL's attitude

13. We surmise that the improvement on the Lao side was due to the GoL having a scare put into them by the prospect of larger-scale outbreaks. Also, Thai media coverage, which

blankets Laos, has been plentiful, so the chicken was out of the bag when Thai TV began to suggest that the Lao were sending them diseased poultry. Despite the mutual Thai-Lao tendency to blame everything on each other, animal health officials from both countries are now meeting regularly and are at last talking about a coordinated effort to prevent and contain outbreaks along the border. With a long and largely unguarded river border, though, it is difficult to see how any control on the movements of poultry will be effective unless the average person becomes well enough informed and well enough intended to cooperate. Much more public information is needed, along with incentives to report outbreaks. The GoL is being responsive to USG offers of training, especially on the human health side, as evidenced by their participation in an HSS-sponsored APEC pandemic preparedness exercise in Singapore, August 16-17.

No whackee no payee

¶4. The question of incentives leads to a point that bears repeating here: An honestly run and efficient compensation scheme is crucial to successful surveillance, as poultry farmers fear and will resist culling by concealing outbreaks in the hope of keeping some of their stock alive. The Lao Animal Health Authorities have already complained that villagers and poultry farmers are concealing their birds from them, and otherwise thwarting investigations. In response to requests for comments on slowly evolving UNDP/FAO/GoL draft plans to compensate poultry breeders affected by AI, Post has remarked that is very important not to compensate for birds that die of AI on their own - only culled birds should be compensated for, either with cash or with live chicks (a possible gain for American poultry breeders if American chicks can be used). To do otherwise would encourage cheating and create a situation in which the numbers of birds involved would be impossible to determine accurately. Furthermore,

VIENTIANE 00000757 002.2 OF 002

scarce human resources would get tied up in confirmation efforts involving needless contact with diseased or dead animals, and the incentive to report outbreaks would be greatly diluted. A part of the draft plan that provides for compensation by kilogram is, for the same reasons, nonsensical. However, if farmers know they can only get compensated by reporting sick birds that are going to die anyway, the incentive to report will be strong.
ROLSTON